

millions of families, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and individuals in gratitude to this Congress, led by chief sponsor, Representative PATRICK KENNEDY, who have joined forces in a bipartisan manner to help those suffering from mental illness. Today, we tell Americans from all walks of life that we understand that mental illness is just like any physical illness, we understand the difficulties you have been facing, and we are here to end discrimination against patients seeking treatment for mental illnesses.

One out of every five adults in the United States suffers from mental or substance abuse disorders, which according to the Wall Street Journal, cost our economy \$550 billion last year. Of course, treating mental illness is not about dollars and cents. It's about lives which are ruined and lives which are lost. Last year one, more than 30,000 Americans committed suicide from untreated depression and 150,000 Americans died as the direct result of chemical addiction. When people are not properly treated, or not treated at all, our Nation as a whole suffers.

H.R. 6983 permanently reauthorizes and expands the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 to provide for equity in the coverage of mental and substance use disorders compared to medical and surgical disorders. The legislation ensures that group health plans do not charge higher copayments, coinsurance, deductibles, and impose maximum out-of-pocket limits and lower day and visit limits on mental health and addiction care than for medical and surgical benefits. As under current law, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the Internal Revenue Service may penalize health plans for discriminatory practices under the bill and individuals may bring a private right of action to receive covered benefits.

Discrimination on all counts must be eliminated in this country. This bill takes a giant step in the right direction. I am grateful to our leadership for moving this bill which is sure to help millions of Americans.

PAUL WELLSTONE AND PETE DOMENICI MENTAL HEALTH PARITY AND ADDICTION EQUITY ACT OF 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Paul Wellstone-Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.

This important bipartisan piece of legislation would not have been possible without the vigorous advocacy of the late Senator Paul Wellstone and the continued dedication and commitment of Senator Wellstone's family.

In addition, I want to thank Congressmen KENNEDY and RAMSTAD as well as Senators KENNEDY and DOMENICI. Without their tireless efforts, this bill would not be before us today.

Mental illness and substance abuse affects millions of families across this country.

Without treatment, those suffering from mental illness and substance abuse often struggle to hold a job or make ends meet.

Today, approximately 44 million Americans suffer from mental illness, but only one-third receive treatment.

A key component of this problem is that private health insurers generally provide less coverage for mental illnesses and substance abuse than for other medical conditions.

A 2002 Kaiser Family Foundation study found that, while 98 percent of workers with employer-sponsored health insurance had coverage for mental health care, 74 percent of those workers were subject to annual outpatient visit limits, and 64 percent were subject to annual inpatient daily limits.

H.R. 6983 amends the Employer Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) to prohibit employer group health plans from imposing mental health or substance abuse treatment limitations, financial requirements, or out-of-network coverage limitations unless comparable limitations requirements are imposed upon medical-surgical benefits.

The out of network coverage provisions are particularly important.

Under this provision, if a health plan permits individuals to go to an emergency room for a medical condition without prior authorization; or an out-of-network hospital or treatment center at network rates for a medical condition, then the plan must apply the same rules to an individual suffering from a mental illness or substance disorder.

In addition, the bill does not require group health plans to provide any mental health or substance abuse coverage.

However, if the group health plan does offer mental health and/or substance abuse benefits, there must be equity between mental health and/or substance abuse coverage and all comparable medical and surgical benefits that the plan covers.

As a result, more Americans will be able to access affordable mental health and substance abuse benefits.

Nothing in H.R. 6983 is intended to preempt stronger state mental health and substance abuse parity laws.

The Committee on Education and Labor has analyzed each state's mental health and substance abuse law; it is our understanding and intent that this legislation will not preempt any of these laws.

In other words, a state law that may contain broader or more favorable mental health and/or substance abuse benefit requirements will not be preempted.

Finally, this bill directs the Department of Labor to provide information and assistance to individuals, employers, and states in order to help them comply with the requirements of this law.

H.R. 6983 enjoys broad, bipartisan support.

And, I would particularly like to recognize the dedication and commitment of Paul Wellstone's family to getting this bill passed. We know how important this issue was to Paul and it is in his memory that we take this vote today.

I urge all of my colleagues to join me in voting for the Paul Wellstone/Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.

It is time to end the stigma and provide fair coverage to those in need.

RECOGNIZING THE HONORABLE BUD CRAMER AND THE HONORABLE TERRY EVERETT ON THEIR RETIREMENT FROM CONGRESS

SPEECH OF

HON. IKE SKELTON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, let me take this means to add my tribute to two fine Alabama Congressmen, BUD CRAMER and TERRY EVERETT. Through the years, I have had the pleasure of working with these outstanding lawmakers. They have been friends to me both personally and professionally. They have exhibited the best of this institution—looking after the interests of the people they represent and ensuring our Nation has a strong economy, strong foreign policy, and strong national security.

They, like I, represent rural areas of our country. There are few of us serving in Congress who have the privilege of representing predominantly small town America. Typically, we rural Congressmen and women bond together on rural matters, working across party lines to ensure the interests of rural America are best represented in the laws we make in Washington. Both BUD and TERRY have worked on behalf of rural people, not only in Alabama but across our country.

BUD and TERRY have also worked for a strong national defense. I have worked with TERRY on the Armed Services Committee, and I have always been honored by his commitment to our men and women in uniform. BUD, too, has been a stalwart supporter of our troops and of the NASA community in Northern Alabama.

While I am sad to see BUD and TERRY leave the House, the institution has been strengthened by their service. I hope they enjoy the next chapter in their lives.

BULLETPROOF VEST PARTNERSHIP GRANT ACT OF 2008

SPEECH OF

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 25, 2008

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam Speaker, as a proud cosponsor of this bill I urge its approval by the House.

The bill will extend through fiscal year 2012 the highly successful grant program for armor vests for law enforcement officers.

The program was originally established in 1998 through enactment of legislation sponsored by Colorado's Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell. Since then, over 11,900 jurisdictions have participated in the program, with \$173 million in Federal funds committed to support the purchase of an estimated 450,000 vests.

For example, in fiscal year 2007, 60 separate jurisdictions in Colorado received more than \$352,000 to assist with the purchase of 1,883 vests.

And while of course the most vests were purchased by the largest law enforcement